

An informed decision

New study explores the impacts of coastal erosion, increased storms in Tillamook County

By Brenna Visser
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Coastal erosion and more intense winter storms may require policymakers to take another look at how they plan for future development.

A new Oregon State University study, based in Tillamook County, examined how beach access and property would be impacted by sea level rise and coastal erosion if planning policies stayed the same.

Researchers then looked at the costs, impacts and implications if the region changed policies, such as providing incentives to move houses out of vulnerable areas or loosening regulation on breakwater infrastructure.

One approach may protect more homes from danger, but comes with a hefty price tag. Another may be the best at preventing erosion, but impacts beach access. The point of the study is not to tell lawmakers what to do, said Patrick Corcoran, a coastal hazards specialist with Oregon State University's Sea Grant program and co-author of the paper, but to give informed direction about the consequences of their choices.

"We can't control climate change, at least not directly," Corcoran said. "The one thing we can control is management. We need to align our behavior with what we see happening."

Different approaches Roughly a quarter of Tillamook County's population lives within a half mile from the Pacific Ocean, with 40 percent of the coastline eroding at rates of more than 3 feet a year.

According to the study, coastal hazards are growing, and can be attributed to three main drivers: sea level rise, increases in wave heights from winter storms and the frequency of El Nino weather patterns.

Researchers designed five different policy scenarios to address what people in Tillamook County consider priorities: the ability to use the beach and property protection.

They predicted what would happen if policies stayed the same, as well as what would happen with certain changes, such as constructing new buildings on lots that allowed protective measures like riprap, removing buildings repetitively impacted by coastal hazards and having no development restrictions at all through 99 different climate scenarios over the

course of 30 to 90 years.

Overall, the study shows that if policies in Tillamook County don't change, more than 2,000 buildings will remain in the hazard zone, and that damages associated with coastal flooding will cost more than \$150 million over the next century.

Different approaches solved different problems. Policies that include "strategic retreat" — intentionally moving buildings out of a dangerous area — would see up to 1,800 buildings relocated and preserve the most beach access. But it comes at a price: moving buildings could cost \$300 million after accounting for the money it would take to renourish the beach and create new environmental easements.

The "laissez-faire" approach, where restrictions about where to build and whether riprap is allowed are stripped, actually resulted in almost no buildings being impacted by erosion in comparison to the status quo. Predictions show there would be a spike in homeowners fortifying properties that they currently cannot do under state law. Current planning policies would see about 20 buildings a year be affected by erosion by 2100.

But it, too, was costly, incurring about \$2.5 million a year regionally for costs associated with fortifying coastal properties. The policy also massively impacts beach accessibility by interfering with sand production, which would also increase total water levels and lead to more flooding hazards. Currently, about 80 percent of the coastline is walkable. In the worst climate scenario, that would drop to about 40 percent by 2100 under this approach.

Though the study doesn't offer a definitive

solution, Corcoran said he hopes the information can be used to make long-term decisions.

"We're so used to shooting down ideas," he said. "I find it useful for electeds and others to play through alternative policies through the end."

Local impact

While the study focused on challenges unique to Tillamook County, the broader lesson of considering development hazards is something that can be applied across the North Coast.

Studies like this could be a model for cities to rethink the development process in the tsunami inundation zone.

"(Planning is) project driven and opportunity driven," Corcoran said. "There's no sense of altering development for hazards"

Such policies could force planners to "tick some kind of box" about whether vulnerable populations should be put in areas known to be historically inundated after a tsunami, Corcoran said.

Think of the Shooting Stars Child Development Center in Astoria as an example, he said, which moved into a building the Oregon State Police left in Uniontown because of tsunami danger. It falls into the 3 percent of land considered to be at most risk for a tsunami in Astoria, and has been inundated 17 out of the last 19 major historical events.

"If that kind of thinking went through the Planning Commission as a factor, there might have been an incentive to find another location," he said.

No decision will be perfect, but it should at least be informed.

"Can we, through strategic decision, at least make the project less bad?" Corcoran said.

Lemmon to head regional group

Regional Providence Group names chief

Cannon Beach Gazette

Don Lemmon has accepted the position of chief executive for Providence North Coast Service Area, which includes Providence Seaside Hospital. For nearly four years Lemmon has served as director of operations for Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital. He replaces Kendall Sawa, who accepted a leadership position at Providence Portland Medical Center in October.

Prior to coming to Providence, Lemmon was vice president at Penn Highlands



Providence Seaside
Don Lemmon, new chief executive at regional Providence hospitals.

Healthcare in DuBois, Pennsylvania, where he oversaw three major service lines. During his time at Penn

Highlands, Lemmon led the design and build out of a new facility that included a walk-in clinic, retail pharmacy and other outpatient services.

Lemmon grew up in DuBois and attended Independence University in Salt Lake City, Utah, where he earned a bachelor's degree in health care administration. He also holds a master's degree in health care management from Western Governors University in Salt Lake City. Outside of work, Lemmon enjoys horseback riding, cycling and spending time with his family. Lemmon and his wife, Kathy, look forward to relocating to the North Coast and becoming active in the community.

Conservancy preserves land

Cannon Beach Gazette

North Coast Land Conservancy expanded two of its existing habitat reserves when it closed on two land acquisitions in November

On Nov. 28, North Coast Land Conservancy acquired 8 acres of prairie habitat on the east side of Neacoxie Creek, north of Gearhart. Neacoxie Prairie Habitat Reserve now spans both sides of the creek.

According to an announcement from the conservancy, the acquisition expands protection of native plants and animals in the Neacoxie Wildlife Corridor, where the organization already conserves more than 800 acres of native habitat in nearly a dozen reserves. The National Park Service partnered with the conser-

vancy to acquire the land through a transfer of conservation credits..

Butte Creek

A gift of land northeast of the community of Neskowin, in southern Tillamook County, has increased the size of North Coast Land Conservancy's Butte Creek Habitat Reserve to nearly 46 acres.

On Nov. 14 Jane and Jack Casey donated a 10-acre parcel of forested land running through Butte Creek, a tributary of Neskowin

Creek, along with a financial donation that will support the property's perpetual stewardship. The Caseys are friends of Sue Gabriel, who in 2016 donated two parcels of land totaling 35.9 acres, both of which are bisected by Butte Creek, to establish the habitat reserve. Butte Creek supports populations of coho salmon and Pacific lamprey. The conservancy expects to partner with the Sand Lake, Neskowin and Nestucca Watershed Council in its stewardship of the land.

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Grateful to be here,
Ann

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